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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600
31 May 1966

ARMY review(s) completed.

PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
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State Department review completed

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HIGHLIGHTS

Buddhist demonstrations and suicides abated at least temporarily today. In Saigon, Buddhist leaders conferred with Premier Ky and Chief of State Thieu, and a second meeting appears to have been set for tomorrow.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:
Allied forces continue to press a major central highland offensive--Operation PAUL REVERE--against large-scale Viet Cong/PAVN troop concentrations west-southwest of Pleiku near the Cambodian border (Paras. 1-2). A captured document reveals the well-organized artillery support capability of the Communist 630th Division (Paras. 3-5). Interrogation of several recent PAVN defectors indicates Communist plans for multiregimental attack on Dak To district town in Kontum Province (Paras. 5-9).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:
Street demonstrations and Buddhist suicides abated at least temporarily today, as Buddhist leaders began talks with Premier Ky in Saigon. The lull in public agitation today stemmed from an appeal by the Buddhist leadership, including Tri Quang in Hue (Paras. 1-2). Elsewhere, factions within the Saigon Student Union clashed today (Para. 3). Students in Hue apparently defied to some extent an ultimatum by Province Chief Khoa today but did vacate the radio station there (Para. 4). The organized military strength of the "struggle" forces in Hue continued to deteriorate (Para. 5). The Ky government is implementing its recent decree banning all political activity by members of the armed forces (Para. 6).

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III. Military Developments in North Vietnam:

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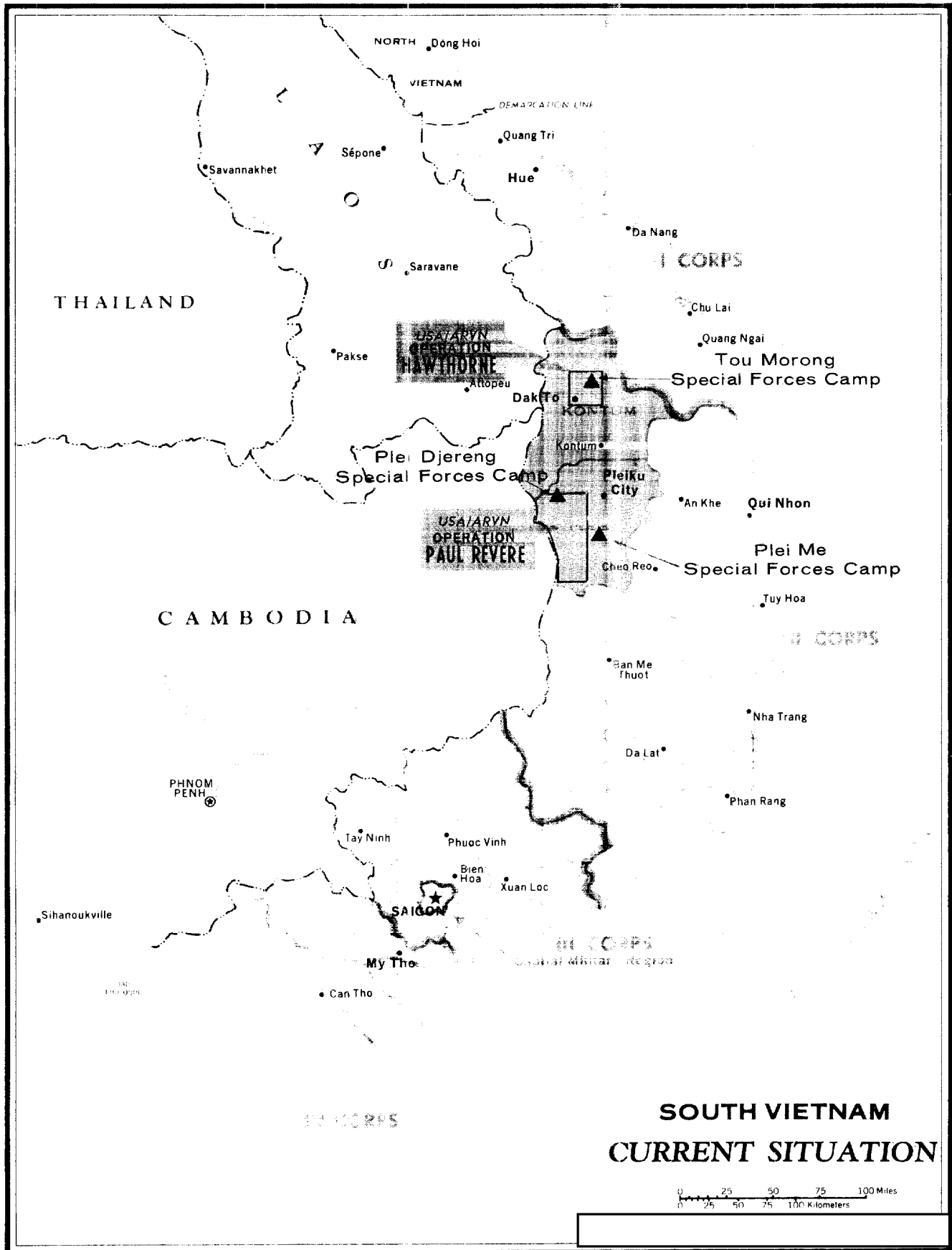
Five US aircraft were lost to groundfire over the DRV on 30-31 May (Para. 4).

IV. Other Communist Military Developments:
There is nothing of significance to report.

V. Communist Political Developments: There is nothing of significance to report.

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Three battalions of the US 25th Infantry Division, one ARVN battalion, and six Vietnamese CIDG Special Forces companies are continuing to press their major central highland offensive--Operation PAUL REVERE--approximately 30 miles west-southwest of Pleiku city, after heavy contact during the past weekend with multibattalion Viet Cong/PAVN forces. Since its initiation on 9 May, the scheduled 60-day allied ground sweep has resulted in cumulative Communist losses of 307 killed (body count), 17 captured, 14 suspects apprehended, and 61 weapons seized. Friendly casualties to date stand at 38 killed (15 US), 199 wounded (134 US), and 11 ARVN missing.

2. PAUL REVERE has as its operational objective an extended surveillance-in-force of the Pleiku Province/Cambodian border area in an attempt to delay or disrupt anticipated Communist preparations for major large-scale attacks against strategically located Special Forces camps and district towns in South Vietnam's high plateau region during the rainy season. Enemy strength in the tactical sweep area is estimated to number 10,735 main force and 4,361 local force militia personnel.

Artillery Support Capability of 630th Division

3. Translation-analysis of a document captured by US forces in Darlac Province on 18 March has revealed it to be an artillery annex to a combat order for pending operations by probable elements of the 630th Division Headquarters. The document indicated that the division's three regiments (the 32nd, 33rd, and 66th PAVN) were to be well equipped organically with mortar, recoilless rifle, and heavy machine gun combat support companies, and augmented in some cases by 12.7-mm. AAA companies and 75-mm. pack howitzers for future operations.

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4. The document stated that the mission of the artillery units attached or assigned to the 33rd Regiment was the encircling and shelling of Plei Me Special Forces camp. Units of the 32nd Regiment were tasked with a similar mission, namely the encircling and shelling of "Tan Lac position," a term believed synonymous with Plei Djereng Special Forces camp. Other missions designated for all the artillery units were: (1) attacking troops on communications axes and in helicopter landing zones and (2) downing various types of aircraft, particularly isolated aircraft flying at low altitudes.

5. According to J-2 MACV, the document indicates that the artillery support of the 630th Division in the western highlands is complete and well organized. It also indicates that the enemy considers the strong and immediate engagement of any helicopter forces lifted into the region and extensive ambushes along lines of communications as of vital importance to any offensive operations conducted in this area. COMUSMACV concludes that the Communists are gaining proficiency in such tactics and that any friendly reaction forces dispatched to this locality--whether by ground or air--will probably encounter strong and well-organized resistance.

Information From PAVN Defectors

6. Two North Vietnamese soldiers who turned themselves in to South Vietnamese authorities on 28 May stated that they were from [redacted] and that their unit was located near Dak To in Kontum Province. They also claimed that their battalion is scheduled to join another regiment in an attack on Dak To.

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8. The information furnished by these returnees lends credence to the story given by two other PAVN soldiers [redacted] who defected in early May in Laos. An assessment of the information provided by these soldiers indicates that the 308th Division in North Vietnam is being used as a replacement training unit. For example, cadre from the 88th Regiment are reported to have been left behind in the DRV to form a new unit. It is likely that the same procedure was used by the 36th Regiment of the 308th Division. The 36th (now known as the 21st Regiment) has been confirmed as of 11 March in South Vietnam by MACV. However, two defectors reported that another 36th Regiment had departed North Vietnam in early 1966.

9. If the 88th Regiment is confirmed in Kontum Province, it would mean that the enemy now could have as many as seven regiments or two divisions in the 24th Special Zone (Kontum and Pleiku). In addition to the planned attack against Dak To district town, VC forces have recently launched harassing attacks on several Special Forces camps in this general area.

10. In response to this VC/PAVN buildup, allied forces are planning to launch a search-and-destroy operation, nicknamed HAWTHORNE. Friendly forces will include the 1st Brigade of the US 101st Airborne Division, one ARVN Ranger battalion, and one battalion of the 42nd ARVN Regiment. The operation is to be oriented against elements of the 24th PAVN Regiment and the suspected North Vietnamese 200th Weapons Battalion which have been threatening the Tou Morong Special Forces camp.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Street demonstrations and Buddhist suicides abated at least temporarily today, as Buddhist leaders in Saigon met with Premier Ky and Chief of State Thieu. An appeal today by the Buddhist leadership, including Tri Quang in Hue, for a halt in the wave of Buddhist suicides has thus far been heeded.

Saigon

2. Ranking members of the Buddhist leadership in Saigon, including Institute chairman Tam Chau, former deputy chairman Phap Tri, and Youth Commissioner Thien Minh, conferred with Premier Ky and Chief of State Thieu for about two hours today at the Presidential Palace. According to press reports, both Thien Minh and Tam Chau later described the meeting as inconclusive. However, a second meeting has apparently been scheduled for tomorrow. Militant Thien Minh reportedly spoke to some 1,000 Buddhists at the Vien Hoa Dao pagoda this evening after the meeting, and reiterated his demands that Ky and Thieu resign and that national elections be held. Minh declared that Ky and Thieu had agreed to enlarge the current military Directorate to include civilians, but that this was "not important." Thich Phap Tri reportedly stated that government leaders agreed to release demonstrators who have been arrested in Saigon during the past few days.

3. Elsewhere in Saigon today, Buddhist-oriented Saigon Student Union members holding an antigovernment rally clashed with progovernment Student Union members. Police arrested one of the "struggle" leaders. The US Embassy reported that the Saigon Student Union president, who was reportedly kidnapped and held in a Saigon pagoda last week, was released today. The circumstances of his confinement and release are not yet clear.

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Hue

4. According to the latest reports, student leaders did not fully respond to Province Chief Khoa's ultimatum to remove their barricades, surrender their arms, and give up the radio station by 10 p.m. this evening (Vietnam time). US military officials have reported that as of 11 p.m. (Vietnam time), armed students were still manning their barricades. However, the radio station appeared to be locked and deserted; unconfirmed press reports have stated that the students signed a later agreement with Province Chief Khoa to leave the radio station unmanned for the time being.

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[redacted] the station did not broadcast its scheduled programs this evening, and has not been heard since this afternoon. It is not yet clear whether Khoa intends to follow up his ultimatum with force, or whether he has been satisfied by the student abandonment of the radio station.

5. Earlier, US military officials had reported that the final elements of the rebellious 1st Division had left the city this morning with Division commander General Nhuan. According to the US Embassy, [redacted]

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[redacted] General Thi left Hue for Da Nang today. If true, the "struggle" forces remaining in Hue would have virtually no organized military force at their disposal.

6. Elsewhere, there is evidence that the Ky government is moving to implement its recent order banning all political activity by members of the armed forces. The Buddhist chaplain in the 10th ARVN Division has been relieved because of leaflets he issued on 24 May calling for Buddhist soldiers to "smash" the Ky regime. In II Corps, a Buddhist chaplain in Qui Nhon has also been ousted for similar activities; the US Embassy has commented that this action tends to indicate that II Corps commander General Vinh Loc is siding with the government against the Buddhists. [redacted]

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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

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4. Five US aircraft were lost over North Vietnam on 30-31 May. Three F-105 Thunderchiefs were lost to enemy groundfire in the Yen Bay area. In a mine-laying operation near Thanh Hoa a USAF C-130 Hercules turboprop transport and an F-4C Phantom flying escort were downed by groundfire.

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